

Is it worth reforming PA?

The "Statesmen's Panel" at KosovaPAR 2024

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We publish here the moderated conversation among four scholar-statesmen with a special focus on public administration, introduced in the text, that took place as a panel discussion at the second international Public Administration Reform conference in Prishtina, Kosova, on 26 September 2024. Based on the actual transcript, all participants edited their remarks for publication and were free to expand or even delete, but the colloquial panel style had to be retained and no notes were added, but – given the nature of the panelists – still not all answers actually address the questions asked. Nonetheless, we believe that this unique constellation of experts in at least three dimensions makes the discussion and its contents both relevant and interesting for readers of Halduskultuur.

Wolfgang Drechsler: This plenary panel addresses the question, "Is it worth reforming PA?," and if that strikes you as a rhetorical question, that's correct, but it gives a nice framework to what has been variously called the "practitioners' panel" and the "statesmen's panel." But what I think distinguishes the panel that I have the honor to chair this morning is the presence of four scholar-statesmen, that is, people who have held or hold eminent political positions, and who at the same time are reflective Public Administration (PA) scholars in some way. That is quite unusual; even at much larger conferences, assembling a team like this is rare.. As you may observe, while the gender balance remains a challenge, the spatial representation of the global South is significantly better than what we typically see..

I will now briefly introduce the panelists, and then we will proceed to a guided set of questions.

So, to my immediate right, there is our host, the Deputy Minister of PA of Kosova, Mr. **Bardhyl Dobra**, and – to quote my London director, Rainer Kattel – if you don't know who he is, what are you doing here? The one thing I want to mention about him is that many of us met him in his capacity as the executive director of IASIA, one of the five global PA associations, and one with a truly global reach, and this is something that has produced an amazing network. If you run a big PA organization like that and much of the magic of the networking is due to

you, you can create a conference like the current one. I would also like to encourage those of you who haven't done so yet to read the publications of Deputy Minister Dobra about PA in *Changing Times*, co-authored together with Professor Michiel de Vries, whom we welcome to the audience this morning.

On my "unimmediate" right, there is the most senior member of our panel, **Luis Solari**, who is often framed not as a scholar-statesman but as a physician-statesman or a physician-politician, that is, somebody whose primary calling, as I think we can say, his original calling at least, has been the medical professional; someone who has been a practicing physician but also the founding dean of an eminent health school at one of the classic universities of Peru. But for many of us, he is truly known for being the former Prime Minister of Peru. He was also one of the founders of an important political party that then won the elections, after a long era of corruption one can say, and in the same cabinet, Minister of Health. So, he held these two appointments together, because in Peru, the prime minister is the chair of the Council of Ministers – I think I'm right in saying so. Later, he was also chairman of the economics committee in parliament, of which he has been a long-standing member, and he, I think it is very fair to say, is still heavily involved in politics. But we must also emphasize that this Prime Minister has been and is a distinguished PA Scholar, who has just written an essay about PA in South America generally. So, Luis Solari is among other things a doctor, a prime minister, and a PA scholar.

To his left, we have **Caspar van den Berg**, who is likewise combining three careers, namely that of academic, academic administrator, and statesman in the Netherlands, which is important for us in PA since the Netherlands is one of the three leading countries as far as output is concerned. Professor van den Berg has been a very distinguished Dutch PA scholar, writing about multi-level governance and similar topics, and located at his academic home, Leiden, where he retains an adjunct professorship. But his chair is at the famous University of Groningen, one the classic schools, and where at their Campus Fryslân he served until very recently as dean.

But in parallel, Professor van den Berg also has been a Dutch Senator, that is, a member of the first chamber of the Dutch Parliament, and that is how he is still listed in the program, but he just resigned two weeks ago. Professor van den Berg was also head of the Dutch delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and of course, I need not tell my friends from Kosova the importance of that institution. You know that Professor van den Berg not being there anymore is definitely a loss. The third aspect that needs to be mentioned is that Caspar is the President of the Dutch Association of Universities, and as such the representative of Academia toward the government, and he just started this position, I think, at the beginning of July. Finally, I think I'm abusing my position by saying that a week ago, Professor van den Berg received an honorary doctorate from TalTech University.

And if ever the phrase "last but not least" is appropriate, it is now, when at last I am able to introduce Professor **Eko Prasajo**, who has often been called the face or the main representative of Indonesian PA. As you know, Indonesia is one of the four largest countries in the world, it's the largest Muslim country, and it is – depending on how you count – either the second or third largest democracy in the world. He is also a main PA scholar in the area and a very eminent functionary of Southeast Asian and indeed Asian PA – he is President of AGPA, which is the

Asian version of EGPA, whose President, M. Jean-Michel Eymery-Douzans, I also welcome in the audience this morning.

Prof. Eko, as he is university called, is not only an important PA scholar, but he has also been intimately involved in the PA reform in Indonesia. As a highlight, I would mention that he was Vice Minister of PA, so in that sense, we could almost call Bardhyl the Prof. Eko of Kosova. Prof. Eko is currently serving as the Executive Secretary, a position which has a vice-ministerial rank, to the PA Reform Commission of Indonesia. Indonesian PA reform is linked to the Vice President's office, it's in the Vice President's Palace.

This was perhaps a longer introduction than usual, but I believe it is important to explain the type of panel we are hosting here. From this perspective, we are engaging with very senior policymakers who have reflected and continue to reflect, on PA reform. We have dedicated this morning to hearing their thoughts on the pressing questions we all share.

One point of note, as highlighted in the announcements for this conference, which gained significant attention on social media, is the core theme of this panel: implementation. There is a saying I really like – although it is not always correctly understood – and that is that a good public policy and four euros will buy you an espresso. This implies that, while you can indeed purchase an espresso for four euros, a good public policy, on its own, is essentially worthless. Anyone can draft impressive policy papers, but such efforts are meaningless if they are not implemented.

This raises a fundamental question: Is this true? What is your perspective on that? This is the question I would like to begin with, and I invite all our panelists to address it. I will start by giving the word to Deputy Minister Dobra.

Bardhyl Dobra: Experience in office has proven that implementation is the most important part of policy. The international community has largely contributed in terms of drafting strategic documents and legislation in Kosova; we probably have some of the most advanced strategies and legislation in the world, but when it comes to implementation, we are stalling behind, because of a lack of human capacities or lack of will from decision-makers and civil servants. In fact, if you do not have the right capacities to implement, translate your legislation and your public policy into concrete and tangible results that your citizens can see, feel, and benefit from, it is rightly considered that you have not done much. Drafting legislation or strategy is not the most difficult part, implementation is. In the end, citizens are not interested in whether you have approved a strategy or a law, or whether you lack capacities, the only focus they have is seeing their daily lives improved.

The Kosova case is different from many others in several aspects, as its PA was built from scratch 25 years ago. What makes it an even more special case is the fact that it has been built by the United Nations (UN), an organization that is not known to be the most effective, or effectively run, organization itself, let alone implementing policies and building institutions elsewhere. Having said that, the UN has built a good basis for many institutions which then were further developed by locals, but there is also a price that we are now paying for some of the mistakes that have been made back in time. Such mistakes or missteps need to be corrected to have fully functional institutions. It is our duty now to change this reality, to reform and deliver on what has been promised and what is expected by the citizens.

Wolfgang Drechsler: Exactly. The next answer will be from Luis Solari.

Luis Solari: Thank you Wolfgang! I want to thank Bardhyl, representing the Government of Kosovo, for bringing me here together with you, this huge PA community, and also to be in this panel of four people who have an interest in practice and who are academics in PA, especially in this time when the world is changing so fast, that decisions can change almost every day. I met with Bardhyl when he was the Executive Secretary of IASIA, and we became friends; this is the intangible reason why I am here. This year, the association gave me its 2024 Donald C Stone Award, and I want to share it with you, dear Bardhyl, because you were really the main commander of that institution.

Let's go to the answer. The cornerstone of any PA is effectiveness, which means that public policy is changing life for families and people. To reach this goal, and that includes implementation, it is necessary to use a virtuous triangle.

- At the top of it is the principle of the supremacy of reality, which shows the PA what is needed to change, to improve. This is the way how public policy is founded on truth.
- But, who knows the details of reality? The people! So, it is indispensable to use another corner of the triangle: Civil Society. It is a must to include civil society to design public policies that are going to be applied to the people. Later, civil society will adopt the oversight role during and after implementation.
- The third corner of the triangle is the Public Service, indispensable for implementation and for successful mid- or long-term policies.

The acceleration of history requires PAs that make decisions in the present, but 100% of them will be applied from the next day: they are for the future, always for the future. Analytics, intentional design of the future, strategic intelligence, and anticipatory governance, among others, are indispensable for managing the acceleration of history. In these times, implementation means to be one or several steps ahead of reality. Reality is the present history; steps ahead mean learning to design the future.

There are countries in the world that don't have a public service or, worse, don't have a strong civil society. How can they deliver public policies on time? Civil Society as a spectator? Wrong way! Civil society must play the main role in a democracy!

In each country without a designated public service, the government can change the whole public service as it wishes. Every minister is allowed to replace public servants as he wishes. Obviously, the new ones will be partisans or friends without expertise. And again, civil society as a spectator. Results: Lack of democracy and poor public policies and, in the end, social conflicts and a failed government.

Reality is synonymous with the truth. If you use reality to build public policies, you are using the truth to change reality. In that way, you are building a truth culture and, consequently, justice as an essential social flag in a democracy.

If some injustice is there, then you go there and talk with the people who are suffering from injustice. To solve the problem, you create a public policy with them, for them. In this way of building policies, you will need to create systems of dialogue with civil society. At this point, it

is clear that a public policy created using the abovementioned triangle will have a marvelous effect on social capital that is made essentially by intangibles: The country becomes everyone's task; the country starts living in a culture of truth and justice; both produce unity, and unity is the most powerful force a country can have to achieve progress for all.

The world is changing so fast, so deeply, that we can talk about the acceleration of history. This means that we need a new way to observe, to think, to make decisions, to do our job. In short, a new PA. For this is what my dear triangle is.

The main objective of politics is justice; also, for each policy, the main objective is justice. Achieving justice is synonymous with effectiveness. And effectiveness is the determinant of a government's success.

If you don't work that way, you will fail and you will become harmful to families and people, and nobody will vote for you for a new term. And the worst consequence will be a decline of trust in politics and subsequently the emergence of minority-elected governments, as is currently the case in Latin America. The right-left political pendulum is being replaced by the effectiveness-ineffectiveness one.

Governments do not like to be watched or controlled. But it is a fundamental element of democracy that there are checks and balances. Although it is true that there is institutional political control by parliament, social-political control by civil society is indispensable. A truly democratic government should encourage the strengthening of civil society through a public policy of promoting philanthropy and the constitution of non-profit civic associations, such as those of taxpayers, consumer protection, or parents' associations, among others.

It is essential to monitor non-profit associations that receive funds from abroad, as their actions could be aligned with the interests of the cooperating country and not with the country where they operate. Civil society works for its country.

The mentioned triangle is also useful to evaluate the non-implementation of a public policy. Is the problem an error in the application of the principle of supremacy of reality, or is it a problem of inclusion or non-inclusion of civil society in the reading of reality or in the design of public policy? Or is it a problem in the civil service: Lack of analytical skills, difficulties to visualize what is at the end of the tunnel, or lack of capacity for dialogue or empathy to include the civil society in the design of a public policy? If you have a public policy that is not implemented, the main reason is that you didn't use the right tools.

In 2015, the Latin American Development Bank published a study about the effectiveness of governments. In territories where civil society is strong (EU, Oceania, US, and Canada) and has a leading role, the effectiveness index of government is high. But in territories with a lack of Civil Society (Africa, Latin America), it is low.

This is a very important issue because, first, Latin America and Africa are the two less-aged territories. That means that demographically, they are the main territories of the 21st century, despite a lack of governance. Second, the huge development of the Pacific Basin, where around 65% of the world GDP is produced, has generated a new geopolitical valorization of Latin America, which has gone from a geographic bi-oceanity to a strategic bi-oceanity by becoming the "middle earth" between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

I hope that some of you can come to Peru during the next government to help us to redesign the PA.

Wolfgang Drechsler: If we would have better things to do than to listen to you this morning, I would be surprised. So, thank you very much for your statement. And now, Professor Caspar.

Caspar van den Berg: Thank you very much to the organizers of this wonderful conference for having all of us here. The question that we are reflecting on is indeed what good reform is if we don't focus on implementation, and I think this is a very important question. It is a theoretical question that gets considerable attention in PA literature, but I think also in all of our practical experience, we know many examples where publicly announcing a PA reform is actually the biggest performative act of the whole thing. And this is something from which we need to move away. Of course, from a political point of view, we can understand how announcing the reform is so important because it makes the politician look modern, on top of things, change-oriented, all of those. But what is the plan behind it, and what is the road to implementing it? I think that PA reform, by definition, is a long game, and therefore, by definition, there is a tension between the political mindset, which is usually, as the Prime Minister just said, a shorter-term one. I like the metaphor of the espresso very much, but maybe there's also another metaphor to bring in here, and that is the one of the architect and the builder, because, as the question also suggests, the architect who designs the house, who designs the reform, can think that if you design a house, if you make the architectural drawing, you have done your work. But at this point, the house is there only in your own mind or only on paper, but in the end, nobody can live in an architectural drawing. We need to implement it.

However, I'm not part of the school that says implementation is everything. Because let's stick to this metaphor: When a given PA reform fails, we often hear, "It's all due to bad implementation." The builder is at fault, we made the perfect drawing, but the construction people didn't build the house right. And that in my view is also a dangerous thing because, however, convenient it may seem for a politician to blame those responsible for implementation, policymakers have to ask themselves the hard questions, too: Was that drawing really so perfect? Did we think everything through to the extent that we should? And didn't the policy hold some inherent flaws already at the design stage? So even though there's nothing without implementation, implementation is not everything. We also need to be very critical and be very careful at the design stage of PA reform because if a reform has inherent flaws, you can do anything you want during the implementation phase, but it will remain a not-very-solid house.

Wolfgang Drechsler: A very important point. I'm tempted to follow up on Caspar with Kant's point that practice without theory is not practice at all, it's just doing things because practice is the application of theory. So, thank you so much for this key statement that implementation is not everything either. And now Professor Eko, for the same question.

Eko Prasajo: Thank you so much, Professor Wolfgang. I am very grateful to the Kosova government for allowing me to share the Indonesian government's experience in carrying out administrative reform. Every government must ensure that administrative reform programs can be implemented effectively in practice. A good public policy is a policy that can be implemented effectively. If it is only a policy, then the impact of the policy will not be felt by the community.

There are several lessons I can share here. *First*, it is very important in administrative reform to prepare change management. This is intended so that everyone in the organization understands and is aware of the importance of the reform and can be actively involved in carrying out the various changes that have been planned. Although the goal is to improve the quality of public services for the citizens and the effectiveness of the organization, it is not easy to gain support and commitment from public servants and the community to make changes via administrative reform. In addition, change management is needed to reduce, if not eliminate, resistance to administrative reform. Public servants do not like change, especially if it will cause additional burdens, new competencies, and discomfort caused by the change itself. Likewise, for society, changes in the public service process often also require new competencies and culture.

Second, administrative reform requires commitment from political leaders and administrative leaders, in this case, ministers, directors general, secretaries general, and regional heads. These officials must set an example and be role models for change. Experience shows that we will not be able to make changes properly if there is no commitment from political leaders and leaders of change. This is easy to understand, especially in a bureaucratic system that is patronage-based in nature so that the public servants will see whether their leaders provide exemplary behavior within the organization.

Third, we must communicate the administrative reform agenda to all public servants, the community, and businesspeople because the changes we make are for their needs. To understand the essence of the changes expected in administrative reform, we must ask the public, especially businesspeople, about the difficulties faced in public services, as well as consider the image of the government in the eyes of the public. With good communication, we can obtain various inputs that can be used to sharpen the agenda of change and how to do it. In particular, the government can discuss with business organizations to obtain an overview of the difficulties in managing various business permits. Meanwhile, with the community, we will get an idea of their hopes and needs related to the quality of public services. Communication must also happen with the media because the good news about the success of administrative reforms will provide support from the public. A good image regarding the success of administrative reforms carried out by the government will be important capital for various subsequent changes. Likewise, administrative reform must receive support from academics and professional organizations in related fields, such as PA associations, public policy associations, and others.

Fourth, to support the implementation of administrative reform, we need agents of change, namely middle-level public servants who work every day to prepare policies and carry out various public services. The real impact of administrative changes can be felt by the community through improvements in public services and accountability of public servant performance. In the case of Indonesia, these agents of change are needed to create new work processes and new cultures in the bureaucracy. The public will see real changes in the practice of public service administration and anti-corruption culture. On the other hand, the presence of change agents at the middle level aims to create sustainable change due to the change of leadership in the bureaucracy.

Fifth, administrative reform at the national level and macro policy must be led directly by the

president or vice president. In parliamentary countries, of course, by the prime minister. Why should it be led directly by the president or vice president? Because differences of views and political interests between ministers must be able to be directed and decided by them as the highest heads of government. As has been the experience in the reform process in the US, Vice President Al Gore led directly based on a presidential mandate to make various changes in the administrative system. This is argued in *Reinventing Government* by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler. In the Indonesian context, administrative reform is led by the Vice President via a national committee whose members are the Minister of Finance, the Minister of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform, the Minister of National Development Planning, and the Minister of Home Affairs. For practical purposes, the various supports and commitments of the president and vice president can be expressed in statements to the public, such as we must make cultural changes, we must accelerate the public service process, and we must improve performance. The presidential messages in some opening ceremonies are very important for civil servants and citizens to win the reforms.

Finally, we must set priorities in administrative reform because we are often very ambitious to reform everything in government. However, we all understand that to make major changes to the government, often we only get a little support from parliament, society, and even from within the civil service because many of them are resistant to change. In practice, administrative reform is the process of moving civil servants from a comfort zone to a competitive zone, and not everyone wants that. That is why we must set a priority agenda. In my experience, when I was a Vice Minister, only three priority programs of administrative reform were selected, namely improving the civil service recruitment system to recruit the best graduates from the best universities transparently and competitively, building an open system for promoting high-ranking positions, and improving the quality of public services through various innovations.

Related to the improvement of the civil servant recruitment system, at that time, we built a computer-based recruitment system or what is known as the Computer-Assisted Test (CAT). For almost 10 years, this system has worked very well, although we continue to develop various improvements. This system directly informs the public about a candidate's passing and can prevent collusive, nepotistic, and corrupt processes that have occurred so far. Even the children of presidents and ministers cannot be accepted as civil servants because they do not pass the selection process. By establishing a transparent recruitment system, the government regained the trust of the public.

The second priority that we had at that time was to build an open and competitive promotion system for high-ranking leadership. The purpose of this open system was to break the chain of corruption that occurred between politicians and bureaucrats in the promotion of high-ranking positions, as had been the practice for a long time in Indonesia. In addition, this open system was also intended to eliminate sectoral egos that developed between ministries and institutions as well as regional governments. With this system, high-ranking officials could move from one ministry to another, as well as from regional governments to the central government. Through this open and competitive process, various positions in ministries and institutions could be filled by civil servants who met the job requirements. This open promotion was supervised by the Civil Service Commission.

The third priority reform program was to improve the quality of public services with the consideration that the public must get real results from administrative reform. We can claim to have carried out internal reforms, but the public will ask what impact it has on the quality of public services. Therefore, in 2013, we launched the "One Agency One Innovation Program," where every government agency must create innovations in public services. In 10 years, we have collected more than 23,000 public service innovations that have a real impact on the public. These innovations can also be easily seen in the information system at the Ministry of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform. With the OAOI program, Indonesia has won several awards in public service innovation competitions held by UNPAN. In addition, various efforts to improve the quality of public services can be replicated and further developed by other government agencies, even internationally by other countries.

Wolfgang Drechsler: Thank you so much, Eko, for that really impressive first statement. You've provided some excellent insights to kick things off.

So, where do we go from here? I see two big questions emerging from this discussion that are especially relevant for Kosova. The first is around advice and consultancy, and the second concerns "digital transformation."

Building on what we touched on earlier, I'd like to start with the digital transformation question. This is something we've discussed before, and the idea of "digitality" doing the heavy lifting for reform is still a strong and *prima facie* very compelling notion. It has this almost perpetual sense of novelty – even within circles like EGPA, where the digital government study group isn't just the largest, it's also the oldest. People have been seriously engaging with digital government for nearly half a century now, after all. DG, as we understand it today, has roots going back to the mid-1970s. Yet despite this long history, we still face familiar challenges – challenges I think Kosova can relate to as well.

There's often a tendency to look for a "magic bullet" to solve PA and PA reform challenges, and these days, that solution is frequently digitalization. The hope is that by embracing digital tools, we'll transform the public sector and solve its problems. However, as most leading thinkers on DG have clearly pointed out, digital transformation doesn't create a better public sector on its own. Instead, you need a well-functioning public sector first to make digital transformation possible.

In other words, before we can think about meaningful digital transformation – whatever that entails, and indeed whatever that means – we need to focus on solid public sector reform. Tossing iPads around and expecting democracy to materialize is wishful thinking at best. That early optimism around digital transformation hasn't held up over time. Or has it? And in 2024, we must ask: Could emerging technologies like AI change the equation?

One key issue we discussed at length yesterday within this conference was whether AI might somehow replace certain public sector functions or, conversely, whether it demands an even stronger, more capable civil service to implement and oversee it effectively. For example, using and monitoring AI requires high levels of expertise and robust capacity – and without a second level of oversight, nothing will function properly.

This brings us to the important and unique perspective this panel has – one that combines real political responsibility with an understanding of the technical challenges. I'd like to start by asking Caspar for his thoughts on this.

Caspar van den Berg: Yes, digitalization and working with AI are extremely topical issues in the Netherlands right now, as they are everywhere else. I would completely agree with the statement that is being brought to the floor here, that digitalization will never be able to replace good PA. I would even go a lot further in saying that, at least from my experience in the Netherlands, digitalization, and particularly the use of AI and machine learning in PA and public policy, has exposed weaknesses in our PA system, both in terms of its effectiveness and efficiency, but even more so on the value side, on the side of public management ethics. A good example, or actually a very bad good example, of this is the way in which, in the Netherlands, benefits for families who have children in daycare have been processed, where algorithms were used that turned out to be discriminatory and that have caused the biggest political scandal or biggest policy failure in the post-Second World War time. The government has collapsed over it, we are looking at billions and billions of reparations to families whose lives were destroyed. And this was all as a result of a policy about which everybody thought, "Now we're going to do this the state-of-the-art way, now we're going to make it impartial, we are going to make it efficient, we're going to save time, so that productivity is going up." And that is not to say that using digitalization or using AI *per se* would be a bad thing, but the experience is that if the civil service who is using it, and if the implementation bodies that are using it, are not operating on the basis of the right value system or are not aware of the risks in that, chances are it'll expose weaknesses in that part. So, coming back to the statement here, a good PA with the right legal expertise, with the right ethical considerations, with a deeper understanding of what this technology really means, is a precondition before you want to take drastic steps toward using digitalization, particularly AI, would be my response.

Wolfgang Drechsler: Thank you so much. I think that for this topic, it would also be very important to hear the Indonesian perspective, because the advances, also in Smart City governance, in Indonesia have been very important, and some of the main investments of the leading digital country in the world, Singapore, are actually in Indonesia. So, Prof. Eko, on this topic, please.

Eko Prasoj: Indonesia has carried out digital transformation since 2003. However, until now, the progress we have achieved is still far from the expectations and targets set. This is due to the size and complexity of Indonesia, a country with a decentralized government system. Public services are generally provided by local governments that currently have different capabilities. With the limited level of digital divide that we have, there are still many gaps between one local government and another. Smart cities can generally be implemented in urban areas on the island of Java. Meanwhile, in areas outside Java, many have not yet utilized technology optimally. Some local governments are even still very behind.

However, in 2021 we began to change the way we carry out digital transformation in government. First, digital transformation was carried out as an effort to provide the best services to the community through the Digital Public Services Mall, where the public can access various public services online. Second, we started building base transceiver stations (BTS) throughout Indonesia to strengthen the mobile network that allows the use of technology online. Third, we

also integrate data in a system called Satu Data Indonesia (One Data Indonesia) equipped with Digital Population Identity. Fourth, last year, we built Ina Digital as an integrated digital public service system. This system is managed by an institution that is specifically given the authority to accelerate digital transformation in Indonesia.

There are several problems related to digital transformation in Indonesia. First, there are too many applications currently in each government agency. For a long time, each government agency has built its applications that do not have interoperability. Most of these applications are currently no longer usable because they do not get good maintenance, and some are not used because they are no longer needed by citizens. Currently, there are approximately 27,400 applications, most of which have become technological trash. To overcome this problem, the Indonesian government has created a policy to validate various procurement plans for goods and services related to technology. Approval for procurement must be given by the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Communication and Information, and the Ministry of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform. The Indonesian government has also built several generic applications for public services that can be used by government agencies.

Another major issue in digital transformation in Indonesia is cybersecurity. Several Indonesian government sites have been attacked and hacked by third parties. Although a national cyber agency has been formed, the issue of cybersecurity is also related to the culture of caution of government officials in Indonesia. In addition, cybersecurity in Indonesia is also related to various applications created by third parties, which causes technological dependence on them. Integration of Data and applications will be very risky if it is not accompanied by adequate cybersecurity and digital knowledge of government officials and the public. To accelerate digital transformation, the Indonesian parliament is currently preparing a draft of a digital government bill. At the same time, various digital literacy development programs have also been implemented. Based on the experience we had in digital transformation in Indonesia, I can conclude that technology will accelerate the transformation of PA, especially public services.

Wolfgang Drechsler: Thank you very much. It remains fascinating to me that if you read the scholarly literature, a consensus on what digital transformation actually means, even among stakeholders, including senior bureaucrats, is essentially non-existent. For example, in one of the top countries in Europe in Digital Government, seven key stakeholders who drive digital initiatives were asked, "What is digital transformation?," and their answers were completely different and did not overlap. So, we always need to be clear about what exactly we are discussing.

Now, moving on, I would like to pose the question I mentioned earlier – one that is particularly important for Kosova but that is also somewhat sensitive. That being said, do we have the luxury of asking only non-sensitive or non-controversial questions? To me, such topics are unavoidable.

And this is the issue of international advice and international organizations. As you might know, in the scholarly literature, Kosova is often cited as an example where international assistance seems too heavy-handed and, at times, excessive. Indeed, this kind of help frequently benefits the organizations providing it more than the country receiving it. The challenge, not least, lies in the fact that many of these organizations view themselves as inherently good actors.

If you were to ask such organizations, "Are you not prioritizing your own interests over those of Kosova by pushing reforms like digitalization or PA reform?," it would become a difficult conversation. Often, these organizations come with resources that are needed, especially financial ones. Telling such an organization, "We appreciate the funding, but your advice is neither intelligent nor helpful," can be a very challenging position to take.

One unique feature of PA reform in Kosova, as you know, is that it has been conducted, led by the Vice Minister, with a particularly high level of legitimacy. This reform process has been part of a democratic deliberation, which is relatively rare and not something we see very often. In this context, anyone attempting to offer advice on how Kosova should proceed with reforms needs not only a significant amount of competence but also substantial legitimacy – something that is not always provided to the extent we would like.

So, how do we handle well-meaning international organizations that offer advice which is, let us say, less than insightful and sometimes tied to their own intentions? Many countries represented here have faced similar challenges, so I wonder: Are there best practices for tactfully dealing with such organizations that claim to have your best interests at heart? I think this is an important discussion, and perhaps Luis Solari would be an ideal person to address it first.

Luis Solari: Thank you, Wolfgang, and thank you for the question. According to my country's constitution, members of parliament can at the same time be ministers. During my second term as a congressman, I had the opportunity to be Minister of Health and later Prime Minister. While I was in the Ministry of Health, I was also Secretary General of the party that mainly overthrew the dictator and then won the elections to form a government.

It was as a parliamentarian and Secretary General of the Party that I had the opportunity to receive an important international organization related to the economy. My observation is that this kind of organization only knows our countries from the outside, they know the shell but not the thousands of processes that take place inside our countries. In the case of my country, Peru, whose provinces are 75% rural and poor and with high productive and labor informality, the speech of the visitors was focused on the macro economy. Nothing about rural development, nothing about clustering, nothing about poverty, nothing about anything like that.

They appear and nobody knows from where, like from a magician's hat, and they tell us that our problem is the infrastructure gap. Two years later, they came back with a new discourse: Now the problem is the deficit of institutions. Then they come back again, saying the problem is the educational system. But nothing of integral solutions for the Latin American countries.

The second story I want to tell is amazing. When I was Prime Minister, the Minister of Health came to me and said, "This country is pushing me to receive this money for this project, but a German corporation has recently funded a similar project and what we need are funds for health care of poor children." I then invited the ambassador and the cooperation officer of the offering embassy, as well as the Minister of Health, to the Prime Minister's office. I explained to the visiting ambassador about our real need. He responded by insisting on the funds for the project that the country was interested in. In other words, take it or leave it. So, I ended the meeting. Several months later, my President made an official trip to the offering country.

Among the documents that were signed was the donation for the project and not for what we really needed: Money to take care of the children of the two poorest quintiles, whose mortality was increasing.

These two episodes clearly show how the interests of others can prevail in practice over the real interests of a country. In the first case, the international bureaucracy tries to impose a country's goals without considering the real solutions to the problems of families and individuals. In the second case, the agenda of a donor country does the same.

There is no need to be afraid of "putting into their place" this kind of international officials, that treat our public servants as employees or servants. Stop them!

In today's world, episodes such as these must be repeated over and over again. That is why it is indispensable that the formation of the members of the Civil Service begins at home. It is in families where nationality, the sense of right and wrong, fraternity, and the value of others are learned. A PA must act always defending its country, seeking the good and looking and acting fraternally towards others. That is why I maintain that a substantial reform in our countries must be the alignment of family policy with educational policy and both with the other public policies. It is from families and schools that future public administrators will come. Depending on how you have these policies in place, you will get the next generation of PA.

Wolfgang Drechsler: Thank you for these stories and recommendations! And now Prof. Eko.

Eko Prasajo: Related to the role of international consultant assistance in development, I have several views based on my experience in Indonesia. First, regarding policy learning, including policy transfer, we adhere to the principle of adapting, not adopting. What is good and suggested by international consultants must be adapted to the context of each country because the context and ecosystem of a country are very important and matter in policy transfer. As policymakers and policy entrepreneurs, we must filter policy advice and adapt it to the system in our respective countries.

Second, I observe that many consultants sent by several international institutions are young scholars who may not have experience in a policy and its implementation. It has the consequence that advice given is often very textbook, also with a Western bias. In general, we should not be antipathetic to the assistance of international consultants, because one of their goals is to obtain information about good practices of public policies in other countries. In my opinion, that is very important in policy learning.

Wolfgang Drechsler: Thank you – and the obvious person to conclude this section is Bardhyl, so your words on this topic, please.

Bardhyl Dobra: I would say that there are positive and negative experiences with international consultants. I have been in office for three and a half years, leading a reform which has been promised during a political campaign. It is quite an unusual endeavor because it is not very popular to say that a painful reform will follow if you vote for us, yet the government received a majority of votes to deliver on such reforms, and we are now delivering.

In reality, domestic stakeholders and international organizations or consultants do not necessarily and always have the same agenda. Very often, governments do need support

from international organizations or consultants, and in the case of Kosova, we are very happy and grateful for the support that we have received all these 25 years, as it has helped us to build our institutions. However, sometimes we diverge on the roadmap or the objectives we want to achieve, as it sometimes was the case in these last four years. Four years later, Kosova is now leading in the Western Balkans region in all international indices – rule of law, democracy, human rights and liberties, etc. Such results prove that our determination to pursue our roadmap was the right one, even though the road is still long until we reach the development level of EU member states.

We have seen that the same model is often imported by international consultants from one country to another, without adjustments. International consultants should be aware that context matters, we cannot just copy-paste a model from Finland, Singapore, or Indonesia, and try to implement it here in Kosova without adapting it to the situation on the ground. During my time in office, we have had discussions with our partners, quite open and frank discussions on the reforms, the tools and the roadmap to follow. On some points, we did not agree, but our government had promised to the citizens that we will deliver on our promises, and that is what we have been doing: The PA reform that had been promised is now being implemented. To the question on whether what we have achieved until now is the optimal or expected PA, the answer is not yet, not the one we have set our goal to achieve. However, it is vital to note that our reforms are moving ahead, and some very positive results are already achieved.

During these three and a half years, quite challenging discussions have taken place with our international partners. We have been asked to withdraw legislation because it is not in compliance with what some of our partners would "expect" or sometimes what certain consultants would personally want or think is the best. Our modus operandi was simple. On the one hand, since there is no EU *acquis* on PA, we looked at the different models within the EU. For a specific issue, we identified different solutions in each and every EU country. At the same time, we built a matrix with our problems and the various solutions, and the policy choices we made were within the frame of what exists in Europe, within the grand principles of PA. Taking into consideration all the above, a logical conclusion emerged, the government of the Republic of Kosova was in its right to make such choices, and it appeared completely legitimate to implement what had been promised and decided. On the other hand, and this is a crucial part that helped us to make the best choices and have the legitimacy on our side, we surrounded ourselves with some of the best experts of PA in the world. The proposed solutions were tested and retested, discussed for a year before coming to a final well-informed decision.

Now, looking at the outcomes, but also the externalities, so far, the results are very good. Since the implementation of the law on public officials (LPOs) by the end of 2023, the recruitment of women and young people has significantly increased. We now have a PA that counts more women at all levels, and more young people who in our case are more tech-savvy, more result-oriented, and more flexible. We are currently working on improving the employment of people with disabilities, a process that has been facilitated with the new LPO. These are positive changes that came from a legislation that is being implemented, a legislation that was not fully accepted by some of our international partners. We had a structural problem, and we took measures to correct it. They did not agree with it, but our results proved them wrong.

The EU country reports on Kosova for 15 years depicted a difficult situation within our PA, especially regarding human resources. In fact, we had a system that was fully blocked with managers with life tenure in their positions – not life tenure as civil servants, but in the positions – and this disabled the entire system as promotions were inexistent or highly politicized. Accession to managerial positions was made impossible for women and young people. Such a structural problem was addressed with our reform. Despite the fact that some of our partners were not happy with the choices made, the governments had to be accountable to the more than 50% of citizens who voted in favor of reforms. In addition, accountability was also due to the rest of the citizens who did not vote in favor. Not only we are delivering on concrete daily concerns of citizens, but we are rebuilding citizen trust in government and democracy, very much needed in our current times when citizen distrust, built in the last decades, is bringing far-right parties into office.

Having talked about the differences with our partners, it is essential to note that the cooperation still continues with our partners, on other projects within PA reform and other sectors. They are supporting the institutions in other fields. The GIZ, for instance, is supporting administrative burden reduction; the European Union is supporting Human Resources, the USAID and World Bank digitalization and cybersecurity, etc.

What both governments and international organizations and partners need to do is think long-term and not be short-sighted. We must not focus only on very short-term goals. It is vital to grasp low-hanging fruits, but not at the expense of long-term goals and long-term progress. This is probably also the difference between IO advisors and domestic institutions and decision-makers, the latter have the responsibility of implementing and living with the consequences of a policy that is implemented. They have the responsibility to answer to citizens in case of bad results. International consultants will leave the country after a few months or maximum a few years, and this brings us back to what was mentioned at the beginning, the differences in agenda and goals between domestic and international stakeholders.

Wolfgang Drechsler: Thank you so much. That was still a fairly optimistic take on a difficult topic. However, since we are unfortunately nearing the end, let me say this: We all know that coffee breaks are not just fillers at international conferences. They are essential moments for project discussions, networking, and building collaborations. Cutting into coffee breaks is probably one of the worst things one can do, and so I am obliged to make sure that we finish in time.

As a final question, and to conclude on a positive note, I would therefore like to ask our three international representatives if there is one example from your country from which you think Kosova could learn. Considering that this is the first visit to Kosova for all three of you, and since you are not affiliated with any specific Washington-based financial institution, I do not expect you to know everything about the country before coming here.

Instead, as sympathetic outsiders, do you have one example you could share? Something along the lines of, "Here is what we are doing in our country, and it might be worth exploring." Of course, we all know that direct policy transfer rarely works, but policy learning – that process of observing and adapting – does have its merits.

With that, I think we will take this round in reverse order. So, let us begin with Prof. Eko.

Eko Prasoj: Thanks so much. Allow me to convey my impressions of the development of administrative reform in Kosovo. I observe a very big commitment from the highest leadership of the government collectively, and I think that is a big modality in ensuring the success of PA reform. Second, the chosen reform agenda, namely civil service reform and digital transformation, are two main priorities that are very important in the foundation of changing the administrative system. Competency building and cultural change are key for this, while technology will be a widespread enabler to drive various others to quickly and impactfully reform.

Wolfgang Drechsler: Okay, thank you so much. And Caspar.

Caspar van den Berg: It's of course always hard to bring in examples from your own system that have worked particularly well. For me, for this question, this might be the creation in the Netherlands in the mid-1990s of an integrated senior Civil Service – a little bit along the model of the UK Senior Civil Service. The Netherlands never really used to have that. It used to be a very departmentalized Civil Service, also at the top.

And by creating one about 30 years ago – and I'm expressly giving an example of something that happened not three or five years ago, but something that has gone on for 30 years and has required continuous attention and continuous fine-tuning and developing further and so forth – this has helped to cut through compartmentalization between the different policy departments.

It has also created an identity for the top of the service. It has been a platform for management development, for sharing dilemmas about values and those kinds of things. And while in the beginning, it has for the first years served as a way to cut through departmentalization in the central government core departments, in recent years, it has also been extended to the top levels of the people working in implementation agencies.

So where the challenge was first seen was the silos of the policy departments, and also, of course, there are silos of policy and implementation. And cutting through that by making career paths more varied, sharing expertise in different substantive domains, but also the policy and implementation – that has been something that most people look back on as a positive development.

Not that it has been without any challenges. One challenge has been that the speed with which people were jumping from one place to another used to be very low, and then it increased to an extent where it was too fast. And particularly, the idea of substantive expertise was put under pressure.

So in recent years, a lot of work has been done to get that velocity down. And other challenges have come up. But on the whole, staying on track with a clear vision of where you want to go and knowing that it won't be realized within a 4-year political term, and also adjusting to changes in society – society requires that from central government – but keeping that course based on the same values to where you want to go did work very well in our country.

Wolfgang Drechsler: Thank you so much, and Dr. Solari.

Luis Solari: Thank you. In November 1989, 35 years ago, from Thursday to Friday of one week, the Berlin Wall fell down, and on Monday and Tuesday of the same week, the Asia-Pacific Economic Forum was created. Within five days, the world changed politics, power, and economics.

That was the start of a new world. The change is widespread: Everything is changing. The change is very, very fast. Third, it has a kind of chaos inside. That means inside this complexity, inside the change, we have other changes. And the fourth aspect is the best and the most difficult to handle: Non-sequential change. It's not a change like 1, 2, 3, 4; it's 1, 200, 540, 2000, 21.

That means you must be like a juggler, with 10 or 15 dishes spinning at the same time. This is a public administrator today. This new situation needs special training about multitask decision-making.

2024 is the most important election year in history. 51% of the world population will vote. And the main election will be the US election, which will change many things. We will not have a year like this again until 2038. So, this year, 2024, is a year of change. For me, it is as important as 1989 was.

What does this mean? For Kosova, if you are going to have a national school of PA in a time of acceleration of history, you need to put into the curricula new matters to handle this new world. Together with multitask decision-making, you will need two other things. We don't need brainstorming; we need brain typhoons, brain hurricanes to walk at the same speed as the new reality. It is an urgent need to learn future design as the cornerstone of the new PA studies. Focus on the future and focus on the future. The future is not far; the future comes in the next second. And the third one is the need to include geopolitics and trade geopolitics. Start looking at how the nation's smallest problems relate to the world and to the future world.

Wolfgang Drechsler: Regretfully, we only have a minute or two for the final response of our host, so, please, Mr. Dobra.

Bardhyl Dobra: Reform in general is not easy, let alone PA reform. However, reforms are necessary and useful. Prime Minister Kurti was very clear yesterday: We need to deliver on our reform agenda, we need to respond to our citizens' needs, and we need to do this together with our civil service, together with our PA.

It is natural that sometimes there are diverging interests and goals within domestic stakeholders as well. Nevertheless, it is crucial to remind everyone that the civil service is not the enemy of the government and vice versa – we work together to deliver something that is expected from both sides. And this is precisely what this government has been doing for these three and a half years. It is vital that we now increase the pace of delivery so that our citizens can benefit from good policies. The world is changing, geopolitics as well as disruptive technologies and AI are real, and we cannot afford to stay behind: Working together on reforms and preparing our citizens and civil servants for this new world is fundamental.

The Government of the Republic of Kosova must build the Kosova School of PA (Kosova Ecole Nationale d'Administration – KENA) which PM Solari just mentioned to prepare for our long-

term future. It is a long-term capacity-building project which has been widely discussed and prepared. KENA will help us to tackle the issue of lack of appropriate human capacities in sufficient quantity that is able to always deliver, with the same pace and quality, and without discrimination.

KENA will also help us to better train and educate current and future civil servants, combining it with research and also step-by-step replacing the international advice when it comes to tasks that do not necessarily need international advisors but can be delivered by locals. Such a move is the key to a proper and long-term development of Kosova's PA. In specific areas, civil service perfectly functions and delivers every day. In some areas, we can draft and implement policies, but it is essential to have the same results across the entire civil service. Our goal is also to prioritize local expertise as it exists and as it must be used appropriately.

Reforming PA is a long-haul task, is necessary, and must be a priority. We believe that achieving such a goal is possible and we are working toward it.

Wolfgang Drechsler: Thank you so much. So normally, it would be really interesting to have a discussion between the panelists and also to ask for some concise and direct questions from the audience. But unfortunately, we have completely run out of time, and I am sure that during the necessary break now following, all the distinguished panelists will be extremely happy to answer any questions you might have over the espresso. So, thank you to the audience for your attention this morning, the panelists for their participation, and Deputy Minister Dobra for the organization of the conference which enabled us all to meet here in Prishtina and discuss these vital matters.